

The development of historic contexts is the framework for making decisions and a cornerstone of the preservation planning process both on the local and national levels.

Historic context is a broad pattern of historical development in a community that may be represented by historic resources. The context may relate to history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture. It can be organized by time, place or theme.

Historic contexts are particularly important in determining the significance of properties. The need to understand vernacular resources, isolated local events or persons, properties of recent age, and commonplace resources, makes the development of historic contexts essential. To be listed on the National Register, a property is required to be significant under at least one of the National Register criteria and that significance must be based on an understanding of historic context.

Historic contexts also need to be used to develop goals and priorities for the identification, evaluation, registration and treatment of historic properties. These contexts were chosen because of their importance in the development of the city, and because of the necessity to protect historic properties. The context development in this document will provide information and lay a framework to guide future grant requests. and study.

Work sessions were held as an initial step in the Community Preservation Plan to determine the need for context development. The following four contexts, described in this chapter, were determined to be missing pieces in a comprehensive view of Des Moines' history and development:

1
**DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY :
REFORM AND RENEWAL
1907 to 1920**

This thirteen-year period had a major impact on Des Moines' physical layout and architectural heritage. The City's population grew 39% from 1900 to 1910 and 46% in the next decade. A large percentage of extant housing stock and commercial buildings date from the 1907-1920 period. The downtown saw a growth unmatched until the demolition and new construction of the 1970s, according to *Des Moines: A Survey of Historic Sites*. While there is a wealth of secondary information and existing records from the period of 1907 until 1920, little has been written about this period in Des Moines' history. This context lays the groundwork for that analysis.

Historic Contexts



Society Stemm D'Italia, 1926, Memorial Day on Des Moines' south side, families attending include Fazio, Renda, Sarcone, Civitate, Santoro, Gazzo, Bonanno, Cianciaruso, Chiado

2

DOUBLE HOUSES & ROW HOUSES: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Double houses were developed in Des Moines as early as 1878 and continued to be built until the early part of the twentieth century. Since most double houses were built near the central city, many have been demolished in recent years. The extant double houses are of a wide range of architectural styles. Undertaking a survey of existing double houses—where the remaining ones are and the sociological reasons for their construction—is necessary to protect this building resource.

3

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BEFORE THE MELTING POT

Des Moines is a city settled by a variety of ethnic groups. A current influx of immigrants continues to alter the city's culture and architecture. This context examines ethnic settlement patterns in Des Moines and the influences on our architectural heritage and culture. Development of this context allows residents of Des Moines to recognize the contribution of ethnic groups to our existing and future city.

4

LIFE WITH THE RIVERS

The Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers have and continue to be extremely important in the development of our city. The recent flooding brought home the power of these rivers for the current residents and reminded us of the influence they had over earlier residents. With the exception of the twentieth century City Beautiful Movement and the subsequent riverfront development, little historical analysis has been done of the rivers' dividing and uniting influence on the community.

Recommendation for Future Study

FIELD SURVEY

- *Reconnaissance Survey areas on Des Moines Development History map.*
- *Intensive Survey neighborhoods with cohesive and unique development.*
- *Survey house styles including bungalow and foursquare.*
- *Research and map locations of extant and non-extant apartments.*
- *Survey apartments for architectural style and features.*
- *Update 1982 Survey, Des Moines: A Survey of Historic Sites.*
- *Survey architectural styles relating to auto businesses and explore national trends.*

LITERATURE SEARCH

- *Explore the impact of streetcar and interurban car line extensions on housing price, location and style.*
- *Determine the impact of the local print media on house styles. Search **Better Homes and Gardens** magazine for homes that set styles for local and regional trends.*
- *Research technology associated with apartment construction.*
- *Explore national social trends promoting apartment living.*
- *Determine who occupied local apartment buildings.*
- *Determine original occupants of auto-related businesses and compile Multiple Property Document.*

1 Development of the City: Reform and Renewal— 1907 to 1920

The years 1907 to 1920 mark a period of political and civic reawakening in the City of Des Moines, paralleling the progressive presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, W.H. Taft and Woodrow Wilson. Progressive and reformist zeal transformed city government in the “Des Moines Plan” and changed the look of the city, reflecting national trends towards The City Beautiful Movement evident today in the downtown river front limestone buildings and concrete river wall.

Downtown Des Moines was a brick city in 1907. Streets were paved with brick. Houses near downtown were commonly brick, often painted red. Prominent business blocks, the old Polk County Courthouse, fire stations and schools were of brick construction. Massive iron and brick “skyscrapers” such as the Observatory Building (1895) (non-extant) and the Old Bankers Trust (1892) (non-extant) dominated the skyline.

A spider web of telephone and electric lines crisscrossed the street. A mixture of electric and gas street lighting provided poor illumination. There were unregulated billboards and projecting signs as well as sidewalk and street vendors. Iron bridges, painted red, spanned the rivers. Bright colors were favored since soot from the locally mined soft coal that settled from the smoke stacks of school, factory, and train gave the town a grimey complexion.

Travelers arriving from the East by rail were treated to an initial impression of run-down frame houses and tenements along the Rock Island tracks south of the Capitol Building. The riverfront was lined with ugly billboards and iron foundries which discarded their refuse directly into the water. Since parks were far from the downtown, there was little green space. State Fair goers who ventured downtown would rest at the old Polk County Courthouse yard, an uninviting patch of worn-out lawn. The county courthouse itself was frequen-

tly described as “the old rookery” because of the bird population. County prisoners jeered at passers-by.

The first attempt to remake the look of the city was a drive by F.M. Hubbell to build a large railroad depot at Fifth and Cherry Streets in 1898. The Rock Island Railroad refused to go along with the plan, so Hubbell scaled back the project and built a smaller depot of limestone with classical elements. The Rock Island followed with its own new depot in 1901 (extant) of dark brick and

red roof tile that was termed “gloomy” by the *Register*. Hubbell’s desire for public-spirited architecture would be realized in the new 1906 Polk County Courthouse designed by Proudfoot and Bird and the 1903 Free Public Library, the first public building to grace the riverfront.

The Des Moines Riverfront became the focus, the center of public improvement, that culminated in the 1907 a change to a commission form of government.

Symbolically and literally, Des Moines was throwing open its windows and was airing out the house. Influenced by the Beaux Art architecture of the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, the construction of the graceful 1911 stone Beaux Art municipal building aired out the stench of both the closed up river and municipal corruption. New open concrete bridges replaced the narrow iron ones in the years 1907-1917. Handsome street lights that graced the bridges were extended downtown, creating what was referred to as the “Great White Way” along Walnut Street. The forest of utility poles disappeared when electrical and telephone lines went underground in 1902. Sign

ordinances removed hanging signs from overhead. The establishment of a city markethouse took fruit vendors off the street corners and the city passed and then enforced an ordinance to reduce industrial smoke.

Women’s groups played a prominent role in creating a new vision for the City of Des Moines. The Des Moines Women’s Club organized the first public bathhouse along the river in 1895, fought for the public park system in 1894, and supported the riverfront public library. Using the landscape archi-



Riverfront plaza at the Main Library, 1910

tect Charles Mulford Robinson in 1909, they created a new public vision. It included a riverfront of classical buildings, gardens, parkways and boulevards radiating out into the new subdivisions. These women formed the first art museum in Des Moines in 1908 at Hoyt Sherman Place. They fought against the visual pollution of billboards and against the moral decay of red light districts.

The 1909 Robinson report to the city envisioned a parkway system be built along the various creek basins that would link up with city parks to form a sylvan network. Of these, only Keosauqua Parkway, along the Birds Run Creek, was built. One parkway was planned to descend Walnut Creek to the Raccoon River and Water Works Park and another was to follow Close’s Creek from 39th Street and University Ave. to Prospect Park.

Traffic was a mix of autos, trucks, electric street cars and horse-drawn vehicles. The police and fire departments had, by 1911, acquired patrol cars, motorcycles, and ladder trucks. (Horses would continue in use for years for milk and ice delivery, because the horses learned the routes and moved along at the correct pace by themselves.)

West Side

Oak Park School
 French Way Cleaners
 Loan Office
 Iowa Savings Bank
 Chuck's Restaurant
 Store's/Apt.'s above
 Arnolds Funeral Home
 Casady School
 Bailly Ct. Apartments

Conservatory/Howard Hall
 Law School/Carnegie Hall
 St. John's Rectory
 St. John's Catholic Church
 Trinity United Methodist Church
 Apartments
 Grace United Methodist Church
 Carson Apartments
 Yocum Apartments
 Fraternity House
 Cottage Grove
 Presbyterian Church
 Apartments
 Olive Apartments
 Elmhurst Apartments
 Walker Apartments
 Apartments
 Burns United Methodist Church
 Lexington Apartments
 Hoyt Sherman Auditorium
 Offices
 Law Offices
 Des Moines Water Works
 Wallace Homestead Building
 Mahnke House

6th Ave. & Madison Ave.
 413 Euclid Ave.
 2nd Ave. & Euclid Ave.
 3624 6th Ave.
 3608 6th Ave.
 600 Euclid Ave.
 3500 6th Ave.
 16th St. & Jefferson Ave.
 2000, 2010, 2020 6th Ave.
 & 609, 611 Lincoln Ave.
 Drake University
 Drake University
 1915 University Ave.
 1915 University Ave.
 8th St. & College Ave.
 4000 University Ave.
 37th St. & Cottage Grove
 2901 Cottage Grove
 3438 University Ave.
 1057 35th St.

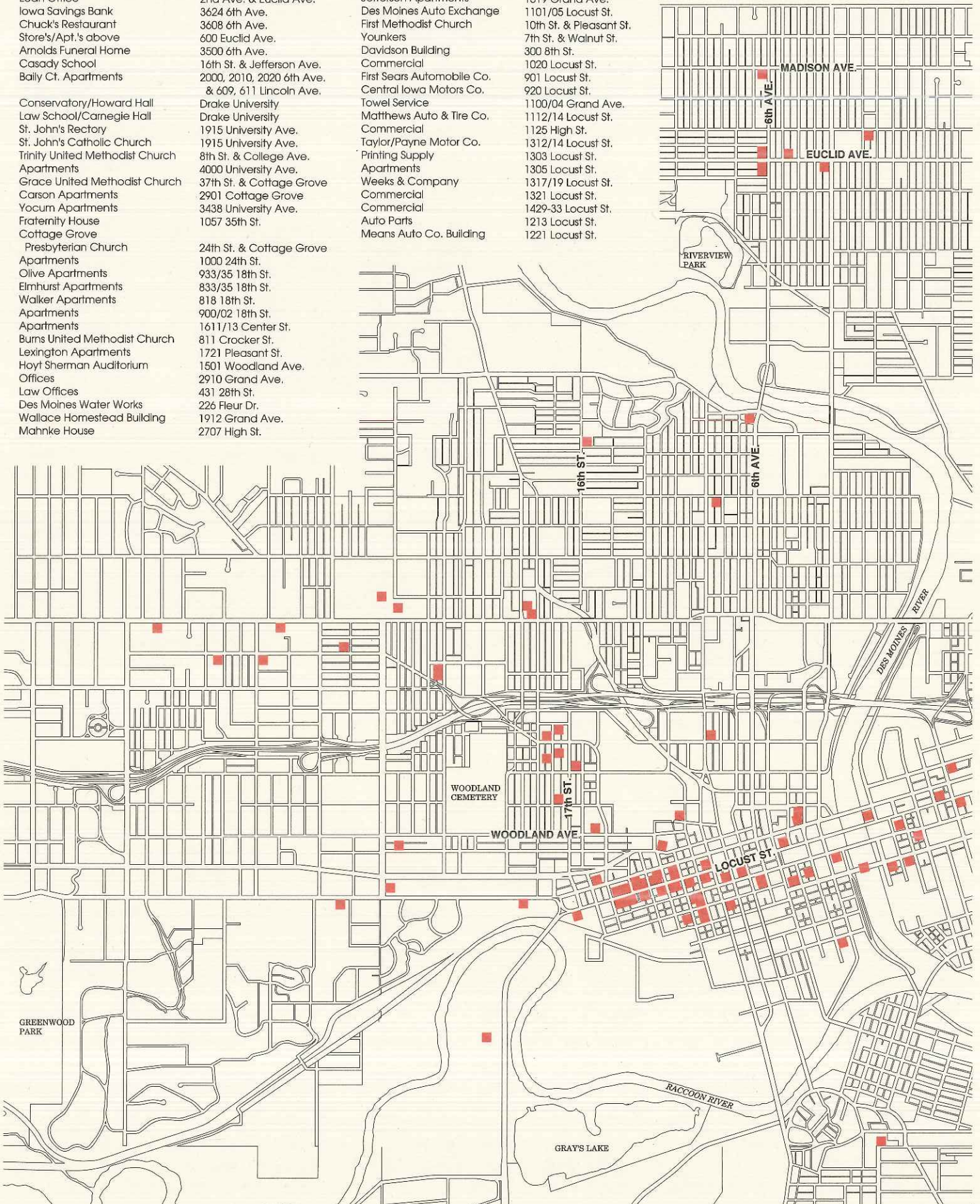
24th St. & Cottage Grove
 1000 24th St.
 933/35 18th St.
 833/35 18th St.
 818 18th St.
 900/02 18th St.
 1611/13 Center St.
 811 Crocker St.
 1721 Pleasant St.
 1501 Woodland Ave.
 2910 Grand Ave.
 431 28th St.
 226 Fleur Dr.
 1912 Grand Ave.
 2707 High St.

Downtown West

Commercial
 Mackie Motor Company
 Jefferson Apartments
 Des Moines Auto Exchange
 First Methodist Church
 Younkens
 Davidson Building
 Commercial
 First Sears Automobile Co.
 Central Iowa Motors Co.
 Towel Service
 Matthews Auto & Tire Co.
 Commercial
 Taylor/Payne Motor Co.
 Printing Supply
 Apartments
 Weeks & Company
 Commercial
 Commercial
 Auto Parts
 Means Auto Co. Building

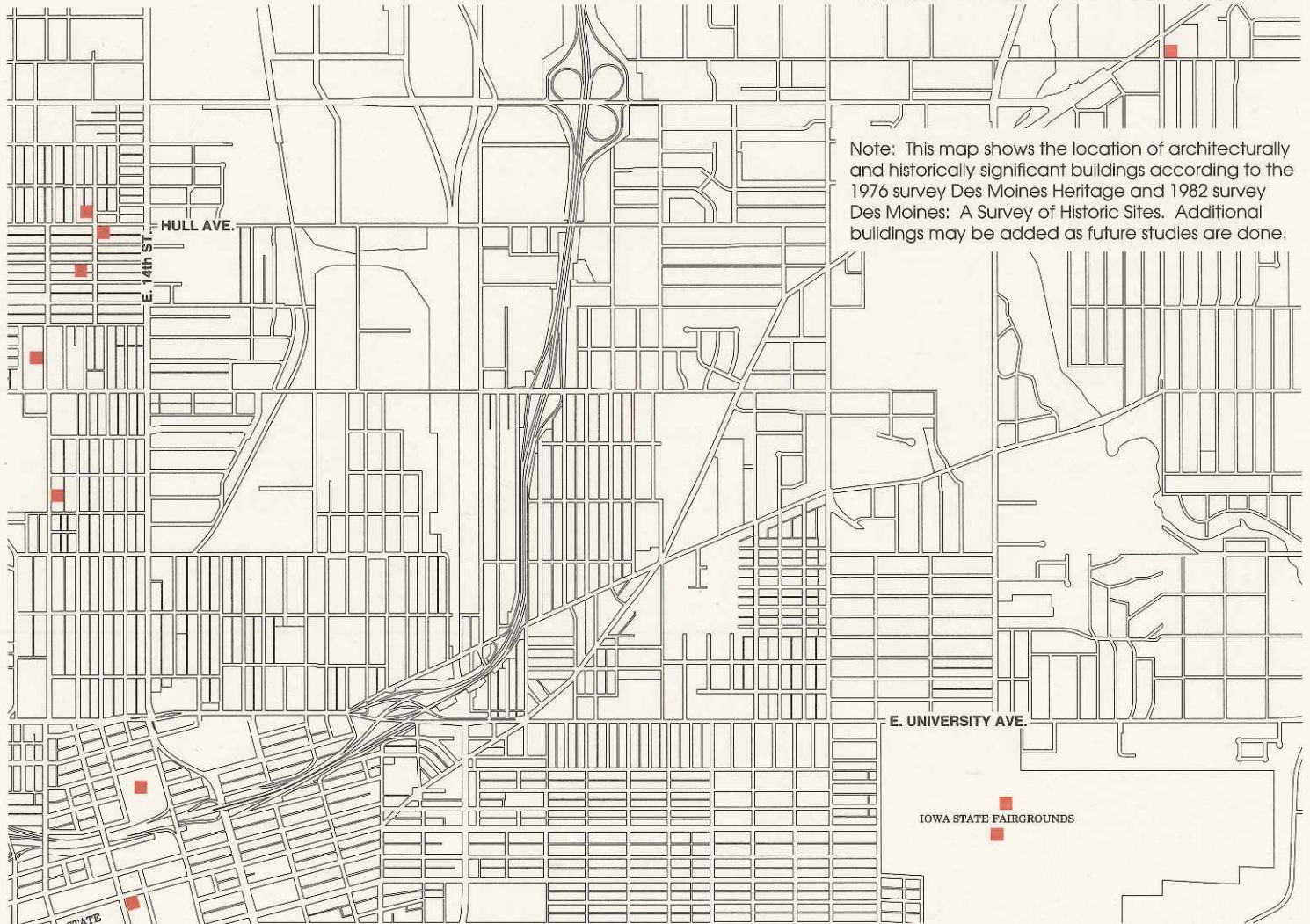
14th St. & Grand Ave.
 1421 Locust St.
 1519 Grand Ave.
 1101/05 Locust St.
 10th St. & Pleasant St.
 7th St. & Walnut St.
 300 8th St.
 1020 Locust St.
 901 Locust St.
 920 Locust St.
 1100/04 Grand Ave.
 1112/14 Locust St.
 1125 High St.
 1312/14 Locust St.
 1303 Locust St.
 1305 Locust St.
 1317/19 Locust St.
 1321 Locust St.
 1429-33 Locust St.
 1213 Locust St.
 1221 Locust St.

Historic Contexts



1907-1920 Commercial and Institutional Buildings of Architectural and Historical Significance

DES MOINES CITY-WIDE MAP, 1990



Note: This map shows the location of architecturally and historically significant buildings according to the 1976 survey Des Moines Heritage and 1982 survey Des Moines: A Survey of Historic Sites. Additional buildings may be added as future studies are done.

Downtown West continued

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Services | 12th St. & Grand Ave. |
| Commercial | 1212 Locust St. |
| Commercial | 214 3rd St. |
| Post Office | 120/22 Walnut St. |
| Iowa Title | 506 3rd St. |
| Kenyon Company Building | 301/11 Grand Ave. |
| Hotel Savery | 407 Locust St. |
| Fleming Building | 604 Walnut St. |
| Des Moines Savings | 206 6th Ave. |
| Hotel Randolph | 405/07 Court Ave. |
| Redhead-Wellslager Building | 409 Court Ave. |
| Meredith Corporation | 1716/36 Locust St. |
| Laster Motor Co. | 1430 Locust St. |
| Merchants Transfer & Storage | 812 Mulberry St. |
| Commercial | 104/08 10th St. |
| Commercial | 112 10th St. |
| Commercial | 162 10th St. |
| Oldfield Motor Car Co. | 1020 Walnut St. |
| Fort Des Moines Hotel | 1000 Walnut St. |
| Clemens Automobile Co. | 200 10th St. |
| Harger Blish Building | 112 11th St. |
| Commercial | 1100/10 Locust St. |
| Later Sears Automobile Co. | 1440 Locust St. |
| De Brown Auto Sale Co. | 1412/14 Locust St. |
| Apperson-Iowa Motor Co. | 1420/22 Locust st. |
| Warehouse | 226 Elm St. |

East Side

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Douglas School | E. 38th St. & E. Douglas Ave. |
| Highland Park College Gym | 100 E. Euclid Ave. |
| Miller United Baptist Church | 3016 E. 13th St. |
| Fire Station No. 7 | 1301 Hull Ave. |
| Luther Memorial Church | 1201 Grandview Ave. |
| Nursing Home | 2348 E. 9th St. |
| Apartments | 1715 E. 9th St. |
| Commercial | 521 E. 6th St. |
| East High School | E. 13th St. & E. Maple St. |
| Capitol Hill Christian Church | 523 E. 12th St. |
| Pioneer Hall/Exhibition Hall | Iowa State Fairgrounds |
| Women's & Children Building | Iowa State Fairgrounds |

Downtown East

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| City Hall | E. 1st St. & E. Grand Ave. |
| Court Avenue Bridge | Court Ave. & Des Moines River |
| Glass Company | 214 E. Walnut St. |
| Commercial | 500 E. Locust St. |
| Northwestern Hotel | E. 4th St. & E. Walnut St. |
| Warehouse | 219 E. Court Ave. |
| Masonic Lodge | 605 E. Locust St. |
| Municipal Court Building | E. 1st St. & E. Court Ave. |

South Side

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Washington School | 1 E. Hartford Ave. |
| McKinley School | 1916 S.E. 6th St. |

DES MOINES DEVELOPMENT HISTORY AND STREETCAR LINES

Even with automobiles on the rise, streetcar service still controlled the pattern of residential development. In the late twenties, the 1927 *Comprehensive Plan* listed 17 separate car lines, 80 percent of which served the northern half of the city.

Development occurred along linear routes, leaving parcels of empty land between lines. Many of the residential developments before 1920 were on flat land as the streetcar lines followed the most gentle grade. This tended to leave the hilly neighborhoods for development later in the 1920s when the automobile became more popular.

A classic example of the impact of the streetcar on development is a proposed interurban route to Perry. This particular route to Perry was never built because of inability to acquire land for the route beyond the City of Urbandale. The existing track built by the company became the Urbandale streetcar line with the interurban company platting and selling off these lots in northwest Des Moines between 1910 and 1920. This caused development to "leap frog," leaving areas of vacant land to be built on later into the 1920s and 1930s. The map, *Des Moines' Development History*, illustrates the leapfrogging development of this time period.

New housing sprang up along these streetcar routes. The interurban service to Fort Des Moines encouraged new development in south Des Moines. As existing street lines were extended further, residential development stretched almost to the city limits: University Avenue lines extended from 29th Street to 48th Street, the Ingersoll line from Polk Boulevard to Valley Junction.

As additional car lines were added, some patches of empty land were filled in with Craftsman houses and bungalows. A patch of empty land existed south of Drake University between the Ingersoll and University Ave. lines that developed during this time. Eventually an additional car

line, the Crocker, was built to accommodate the new neighborhoods hidden behind Woodland Cemetery.

Early streetcar lines also defined commercial neighborhoods. Early shopping districts along the Crocker, University, East 9th Street and Army Post Road routes were the first commercial districts located away from the downtown. Branch post offices, libraries, movie theaters and grocery stores were prominent attractions along these routes.

Many of these earlier street car routes are being considered today for possible bicycle routes. The initial portion of the Saylorville bicycle path that runs along the east side of the river, to Pennsylvania Avenue follows the path of the old Northwestern Railroad. These earlier networks were well thought out and provide an excellent basis for guiding future plans for walking and bicycling paths.

RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

As times changed nationally, home styles also changed dramatically. The trend toward less ornamentation and simpler house designs is typified in many neighborhoods from this period. Although many of the homes built between 1907 to 1920 incorporate elements from many different styles, there are two distinct house types that dominate the period: the American Foursquare and the bungalow. Both of these house types incorporated Craftsman, Classical Revival, Mission, and Prairie influences. In the teens and early twenties, Colonial Revival and European styles also impacted both house types.

The descriptions that follow are included to describe the major features of each house type. This document is primarily concerned with their location in Des Moines and their contextual role in the city's development. There are several books on house styles that the reader can use to educate themselves more thoroughly on these two house types.

American Foursquare

The standard Foursquare has two full stories and an attic, usually with a

full basement. It generally is symmetrical and has a simplicity of decoration that predated the Victorian era. The porch generally stretches across the front of the house as a major design element. The porch displays simple, heavy columns, often with a low wall or simple stick balustrade. The homes often have wide eaves that protect the house from wind and rain. One might describe the Foursquare as self-contained and dignified. In Des Moines, some Foursquares are transitional from the Victorian to the Craftsman eras. An early Foursquare may retain a bay window or decorative element from Victorian styles.

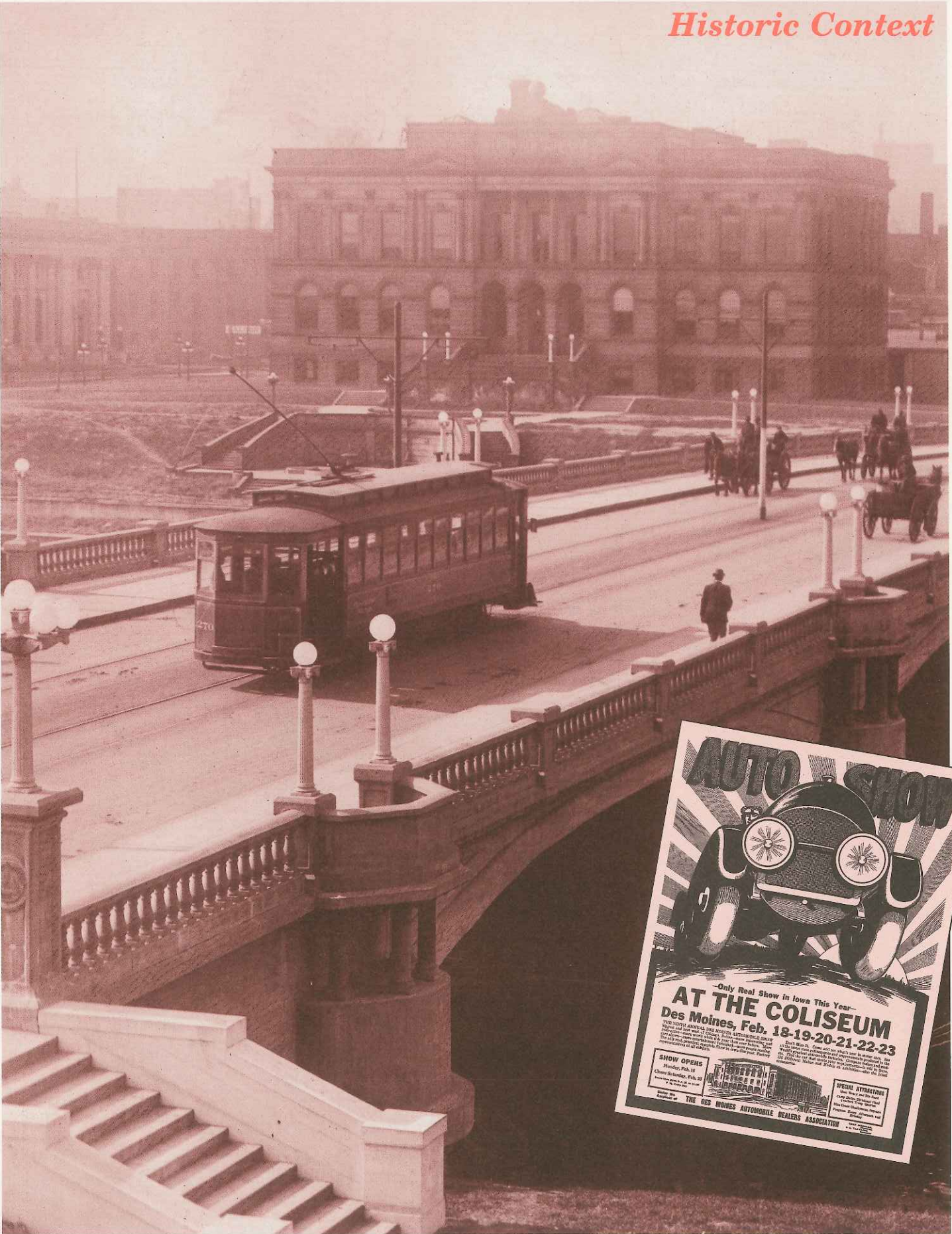
The Foursquare house type has not been recognized nationally until the last ten years and is only now coming into its own locally. It was a house style built in many middle-class neighborhoods developing between 1907 to 1920. There are a large number of extant Foursquare houses near Drake University. There are also concentrations of Foursquare houses south of I-235 from Sherman Hill to 56th Street. There has been no survey of Foursquare houses in Des Moines.

Bungalow

The true bungalow is a one-story house with a low-pitched roof, often with multiple gables, wide roof overhangs and decoratively treated rafters. The porch(es) serve as a transition from the inside to the outside. The bungalow is a rambling, informal house, full of cozy nooks and low spaces. In contrast to the Foursquare, it is informal and has few barriers between indoor and outdoor spaces. In Des Moines, bungalows are often two stories or at least have an upper story dormer.

The bungalow comprises the largest group of intact housing in Des Moines representing a major type of architecture. The *Location of Architecturally Significant Bungalows* map illustrates the dispersal of bungalow houses throughout the City of Des Moines irrespective of date of construction. It appears the bungalow was under-represented at the time the survey was done. A bungalow home was often built for a middle-class

Historic Context



Street car on the Locust Street bridge, downtown with Des Moines Public Library in the background Inset: Des Moines Register auto show advertisement, 1917

Historic Context



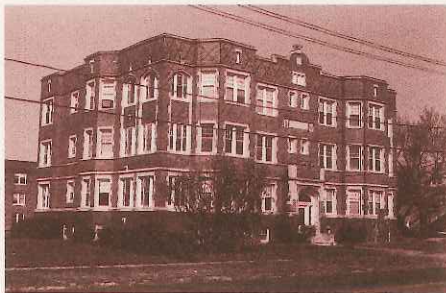
The Fleming Building, 1907, designed by Daniel H. Burnham and Company

family and may not be what many consider truly old. As such, the bungalow's importance in the City's development has not been recognized.

Two areas of the city are noted for the predominance of bungalows. The Union Park area is one of the most homogeneous architectural districts in the city; most of the houses are bungalows built between 1910-1920. The Woodland Heights area on the west side exhibits a similar concentration of one-story bungalows built between 1907-1920.

Apartment Buildings

Another pattern of this period was a dramatic increase in apartment houses. Early apartment houses were often built along streetcar routes. In 1908, the City Directory listed 54 apartment houses or flats; by 1920 it stood at 185. In 1908 almost all



Norman Apartments, 1908, Proudfoot and Bird, 3103 University Avenue

apartment buildings were located on the west side and just north of the downtown. Nearly all had relatively well-to-do tenants. Many of these early apartment houses such as the Portwell-Wellsport, the Colonnade, and the Lexington (all extant) were located west of the downtown in present-day Sherman Hill. Those located in or north of the downtown are mostly demolished although several remain along Sixth Avenue north of University Avenue.

By 1920, a few extant apartment buildings followed the streetcars west along Grand Avenue and Ingersoll. A pattern emerged; apartment house construction close to town and along commercial routes, neighborhoods of small private homes in new subdivisions. Double houses and row houses were quickly disappearing during this period.

BUILDING MATERIALS AND COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION

A tall skyline was considered an important element of a prosperous city in the early twentieth century. In 1907, Des Moines citizens flocked to the construction site of the state's first steel skyscraper at 6th and Walnut, the Fleming Block, (extant) designed by Daniel H. Burnham and Company. Watching workmen ride steel beams into the clouds became a common pastime along Sixth Avenue as the race to have the tallest building reached new heights.

The old Bankers Trust building in 1910 added four additional floors of steel-beamed construction to raise it to twelve stories. The Polk-Hippee Block (Midland Financial) (extant) in 1913 matched the height of Bankers Trust (non-extant), rising twelve stories with a terra-cotta veneer. The Des Moines Register building on Locust Street was champion at thirteen stories for seven years. Then the 18-story Equitable building (extant) on Sixth Avenue, seized and held that crown for nearly 50 years.

New building materials and innovative structural systems were introduced in this period from 1907 to 1920. The steel-framed skyscraper, already mentioned, had fired the public's imagination. Builders employed glazed bricks or terra cotta panels, ornamentation, and veneer to the new soaring structures.

By the First World War, the use of plywood and hollow tile block emerged in small commercial structures. Several notable commercial buildings remain from this time period as noted in the map, *1907-1920 Commercial and Institutional Buildings of Architectural and Historical Significance* identified in the City of Des Moines sponsored surveys.

The Iowa cement industry grew dramatically in this period. Mason City became a regional supplier to cement for concrete construction of buildings, bridges and roadways. Des Moines constructed five massive concrete arched bridges over the Des Moines River from 1906 to

1917. *The Register* noted the simultaneous introduction of steel beam and reinforced concrete construction techniques. The Hubbell Building (extant) and the Merchants Transfer Warehouse (extant) employed massive concrete pillars and poured concrete floors.

In contrast, 100 Court Avenue, the Warfield-Pratt-Howell warehouse (extant), started in 1901, employed the familiar heavy wooden floors, joists and beams.

Auto Related Businesses

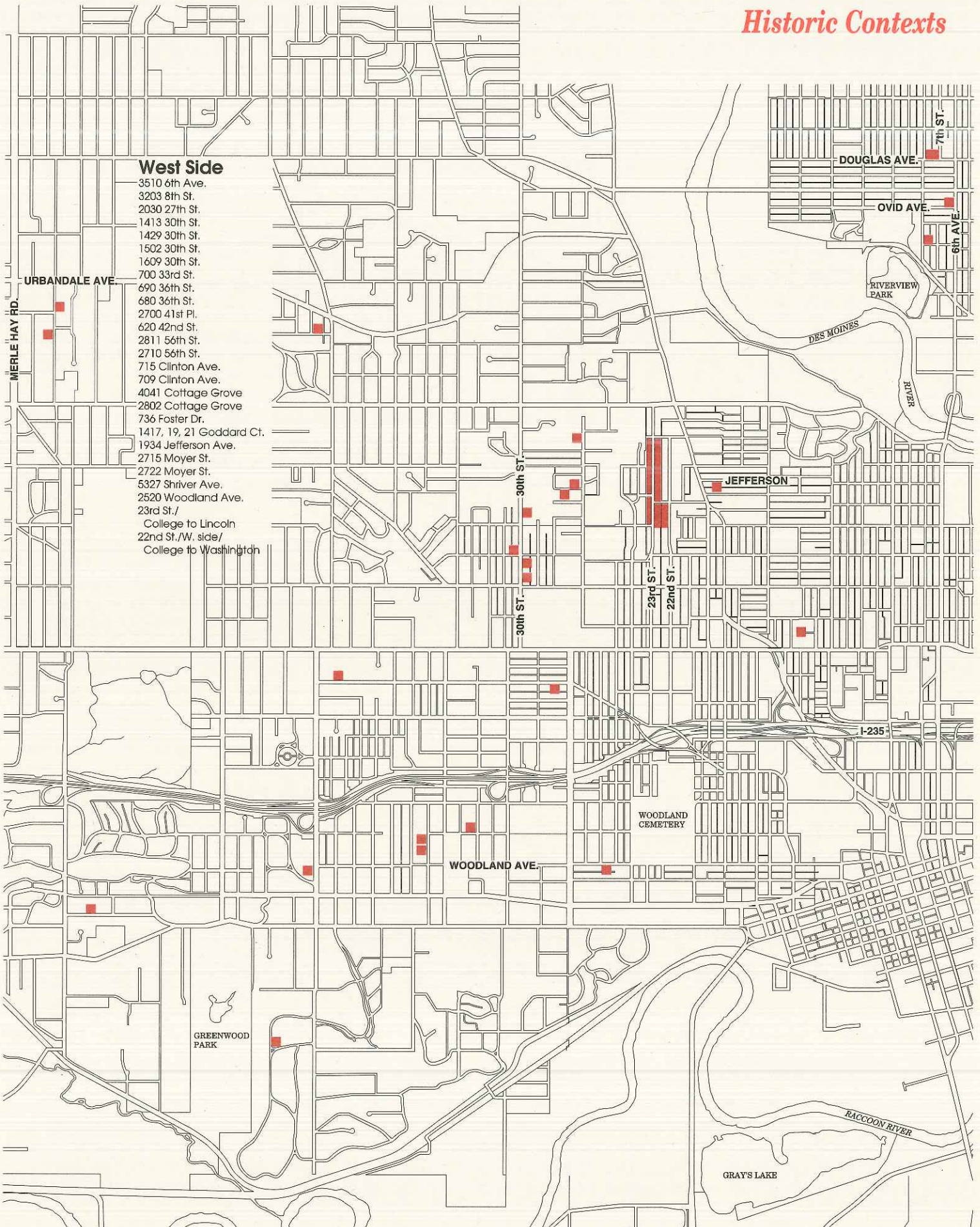
The automobile era began to transform Des Moines during this period. Automobile ownership skyrocketed. Car dealerships in 1908 totaled 16, but in 1920 it had risen to an astronomical 128. Repair shops increased from 8 to 51. Private homes added garages, while in new subdivisions, alleys were giving way to driveways connected to the street.

The use of the automobile reflected itself in the city's architecture. Truss and curved truss roofs were appearing in automobile businesses as posts were an inconvenience in moving automobiles. In fact, auto businesses, dealers, garages, and service stations were incorporating all these new materials: hollow tile, terra cotta, concrete, glass, and truss roofs.

Service stations throughout the city were located at intersections and set at an angle to the street, breaking existing streetscape patterns of uniform setback parallel to the street. In newly developing commercial areas, buildings were set back from, rather than adjacent to the sidewalk, to accommodate diagonal parking in front of the building.

The best extant examples of these new materials on auto related businesses are located between 9th to 15th Streets along Locust St, known in the 1920s as Auto Row. Auto Row burgeoned with a myriad of auto-related businesses and the beginning of the first parking garage in the teens and early twenties. This street was cited in *Des Moines: A Survey of Historic Sites* as one that should be explored for a National Register Nomination.

Historic Contexts



West Side

- 3510 6th Ave.
- 3203 8th St.
- 2030 27th St.
- 1413 30th St.
- 1429 30th St.
- 1502 30th St.
- 1609 30th St.
- 700 33rd St.
- 690 36th St.
- 680 36th St.
- 2700 41st Pl.
- 620 42nd St.
- 2811 56th St.
- 2710 56th St.
- 715 Clinton Ave.
- 709 Clinton Ave.
- 4041 Cottage Grove
- 2802 Cottage Grove
- 736 Foster Dr.
- 1417, 19, 21 Goddard Ct.
- 1934 Jefferson Ave.
- 2715 Moyer St.
- 2722 Moyer St.
- 5327 Shriver Ave.
- 2520 Woodland Ave.
- 23rd St./
- College to Lincoln
- 22nd St./W. side/
- College to Washington

URBANDALE AVE.

MERLE HAY RD.

DOUGLAS AVE.

OVID AVE.

RIVERVIEW PARK

DES MOINES RIVER

RIVER

JEFFERSON

30th St.

30th St.

29th St.

22nd St.

I-235

WOODLAND CEMETERY

WOODLAND AVE.

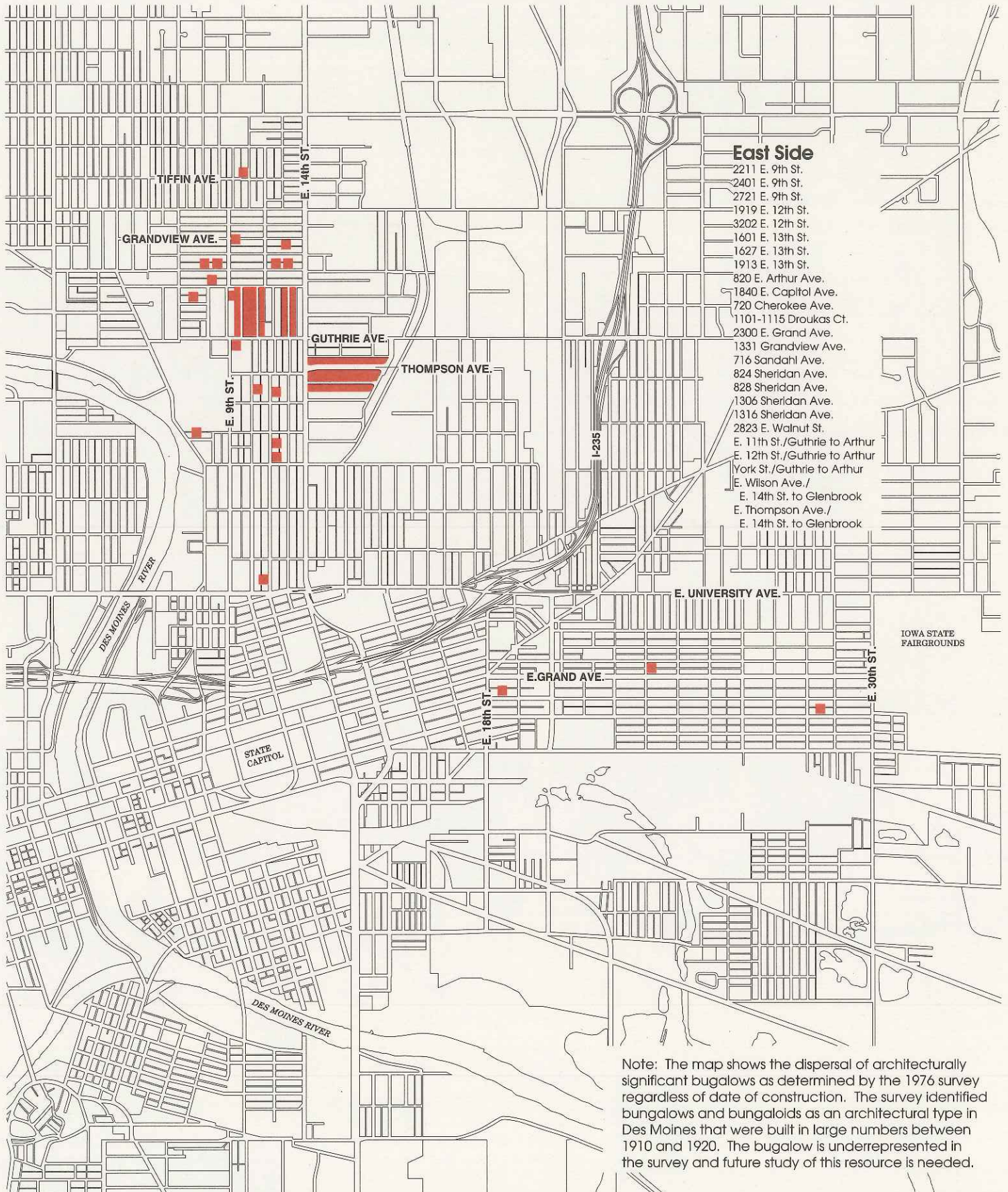
GREENWOOD PARK

RACCOON RIVER

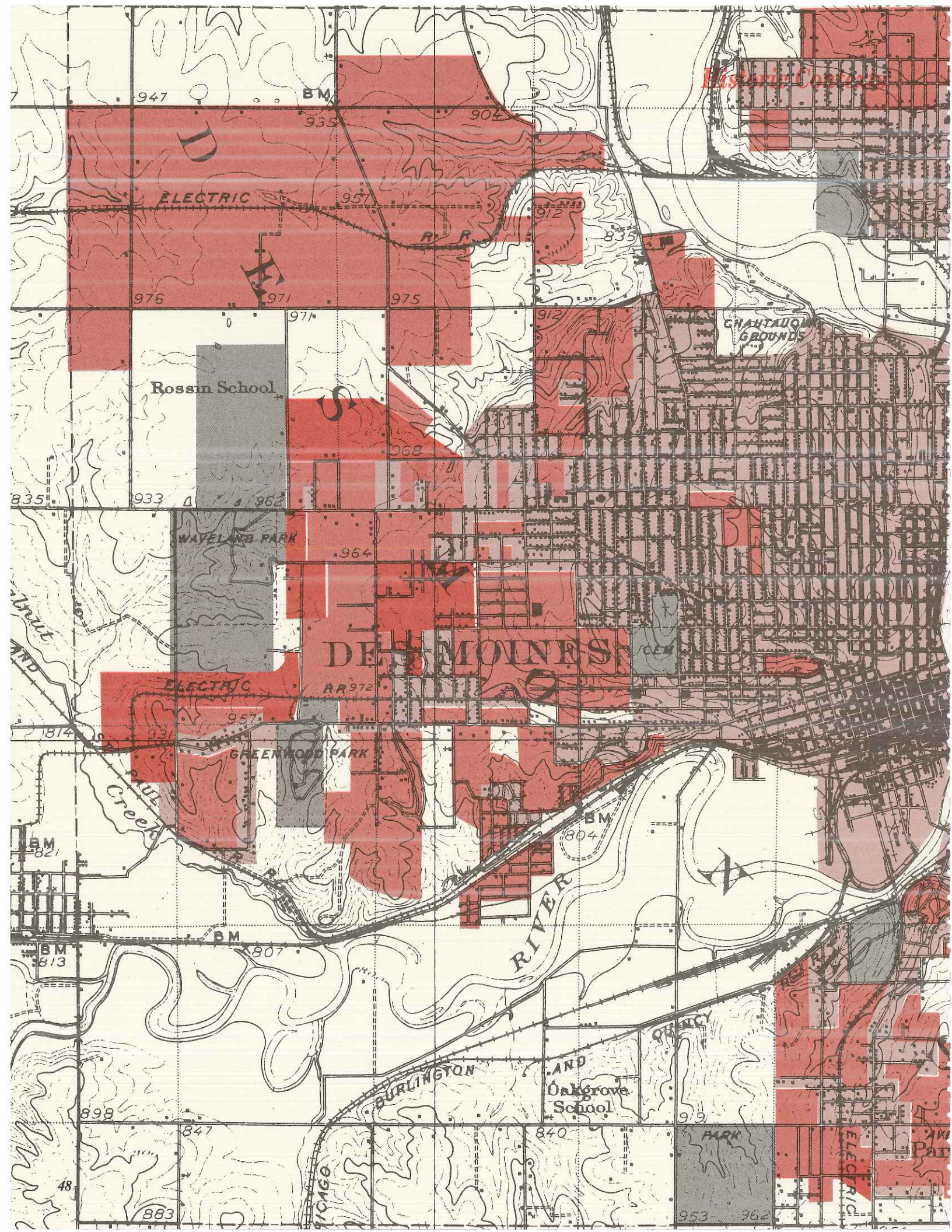
GRAY'S LAKE

Location of Architecturally Significant Bungalows

DES MOINES CITY-WIDE MAP, 1990

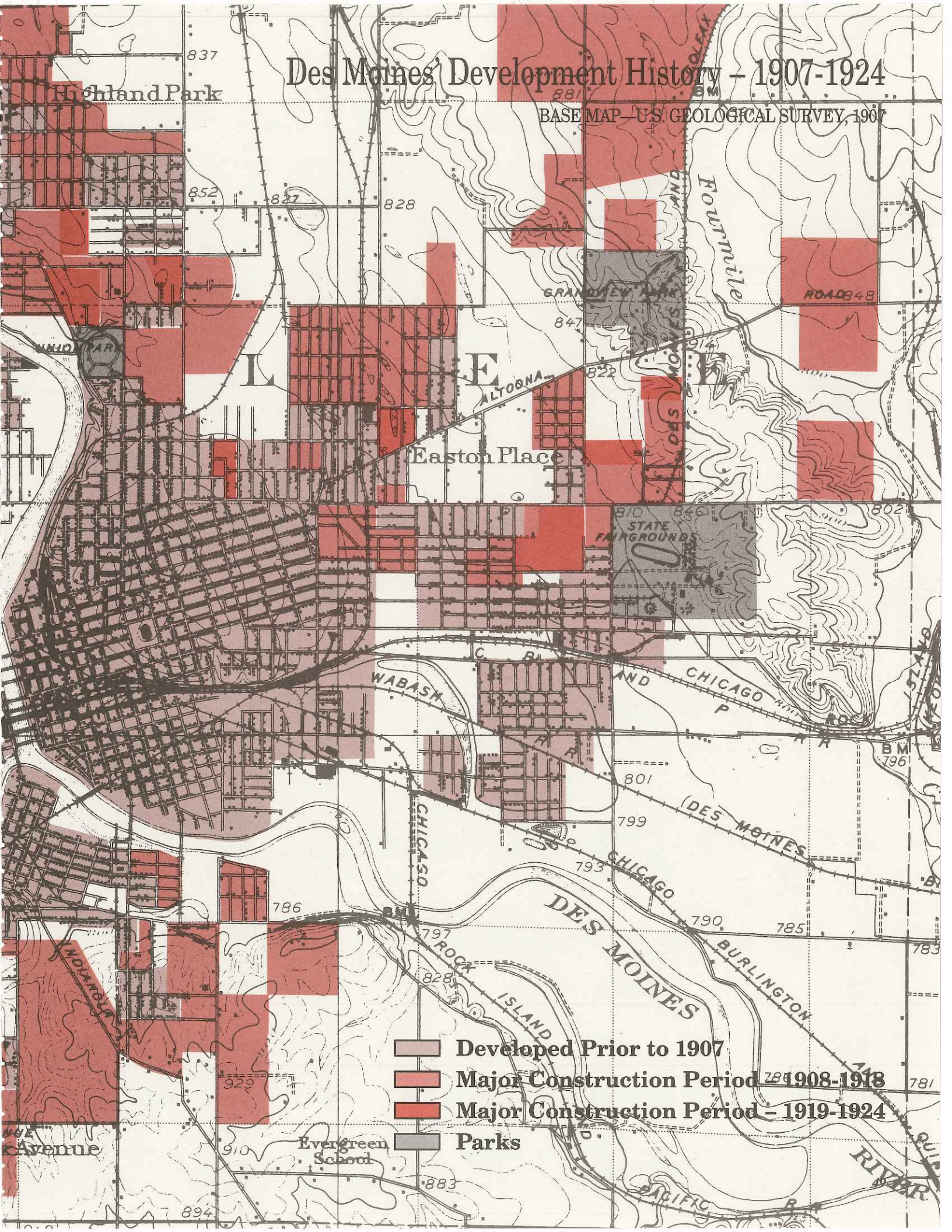


Note: The map shows the dispersal of architecturally significant bungalows as determined by the 1976 survey regardless of date of construction. The survey identified bungalows and bungalowoids as an architectural type in Des Moines that were built in large numbers between 1910 and 1920. The bungalow is underrepresented in the survey and future study of this resource is needed.



Des Moines Development History - 1907-1924

BASE MAP - U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, 1907



- Developed Prior to 1907
- Major Construction Period 1908-1918
- Major Construction Period 1919-1924
- Parks

Recommendations for Future Study

Double Houses

FIELD SURVEY

- *Determine the significance of remaining double houses by:*
 - *Architectural Style,*
 - *Ethnic Heritage.*
- *Link to the ongoing research of ethnic groups in Des Moines.*

LITERATURE SEARCH

- *Search 1884, 1891 and 1901 Sanborn Maps to show non-extant double houses.*
- *Search Des Moines City Directories to determine if they were built by:*
 - *Developer,*
 - *Owner Occupant,*
 - *Extended Family.*



2 Double Houses & Row Houses: Affordable Housing

Double houses were common in much of early Des Moines from the 1880s until approximately 1908. They were urban dwellings built within the central city—rarely in the western suburbs of the 1880s.

They tended to be of modest scale, located near other double houses and row houses. Those few double houses built in the western suburbs after 1908 were generally larger and of a more ornate style.

A review of early fire insurance maps show concentrations of double houses in Sherman Hill to Grand Avenue and north of Grand Avenue from the river west.

On the east side, double houses were prevalent near the State Capitol building. The west side suburban communities of Greenwood Park and University Place showed little interest in double houses.

Construction of double houses came to a standstill by 1908 as apartment houses and small private homes were being built. Double houses or “duplexes” reappeared during the Depression.

Modern zoning laws have limited areas of duplex construction, so duplexes are clustered while the older double houses were more scattered about individually.

Duplexes are usually simpler than early double houses. Since the periods of construction and the styles are so different using the terms “double houses” and “duplexes” provides a useful distinction in assessing multi-family dwellings.

The first double house in Des Moines was reported in the *Register* on August 21, 1877. Under the title “Handsome Houses,” it reported that Conrad Youngerman, a major downtown builder, had constructed a two-story asbestine stone double house, elegantly furnished with bathrooms for each bedroom, hot and cold running water, gas lights and steam heat. Mr. Youngerman was to occupy

Double house, 525-527 Polk Boulevard (opposite top)
Double house in Sherman Hill (opposite bottom)

one of these “elegant houses”.

A preliminary review of the county records and city directories for three extant double houses suggest that owner occupancy for double houses was common. A pattern emerges for a widow to sell a larger single-family house and then build a double house to provide rental income.

1993 Survey

A reconnaissance survey of existing double houses was completed in 1993 by consultant John Zeller that found approximately 90 such structures standing.

To gather initial information on double houses, he first reviewed the 1884, 1891, and 1901 Sanborn maps. He then reviewed the 1920 Sanborn maps, which were updated in the early 1950s, to get an idea of number, location, and size of double houses.

Lastly, he toured the neighborhoods to determine the number of extant properties and photographed each remaining structure.

The survey showed that the architectural styles of double houses correlate with their geographic location. This may be because the architectural style of double houses varied by decade.

Possible ties to ethnic groups may also contribute to differences in architectural style. Many of these structures existed in areas such as the Scandinavian settlement on the east side.

A typical double-house style on the east side employs separate porches on the corners with the vestibules at the center. Matching decorative windows are generally used on the vestibules.

In a majority of cases, double houses in Des Moines show symmetrical massing. However, a few are asymmetrical or employ different architectural styles on either side. In Sherman Hill, for instance, there are five examples of a style employing a broad front porch, clerestory windows, a simple cornice and Roman-style leaded windows.

ROW HOUSES

The existence of row houses in Des Moines in the middle 1870s indicates an early urban character to the city in spite of an abundance of available land. Row houses were built exclusively in the central downtown area. The earliest, Chestnut Row, ran from 4th to 6th streets along Chestnut St. (Keosauqua Way), and was the largest. Other row houses were built later near 13th Street and Grand Avenue, and on Park Street between 3rd and 4th Streets. East side row houses faced the east facade of the State Capitol Building.

Chestnut Row was initially an upscale residential area but fell rapidly in status. Row houses built in the 1870s on Pelton Avenue and 4th Street



Row House residence, 1880, 733-35 19th Street

in the notorious White Chapel red-light district (earlier called Scribner's Row) fell into a state of disrepair soon after their construction.

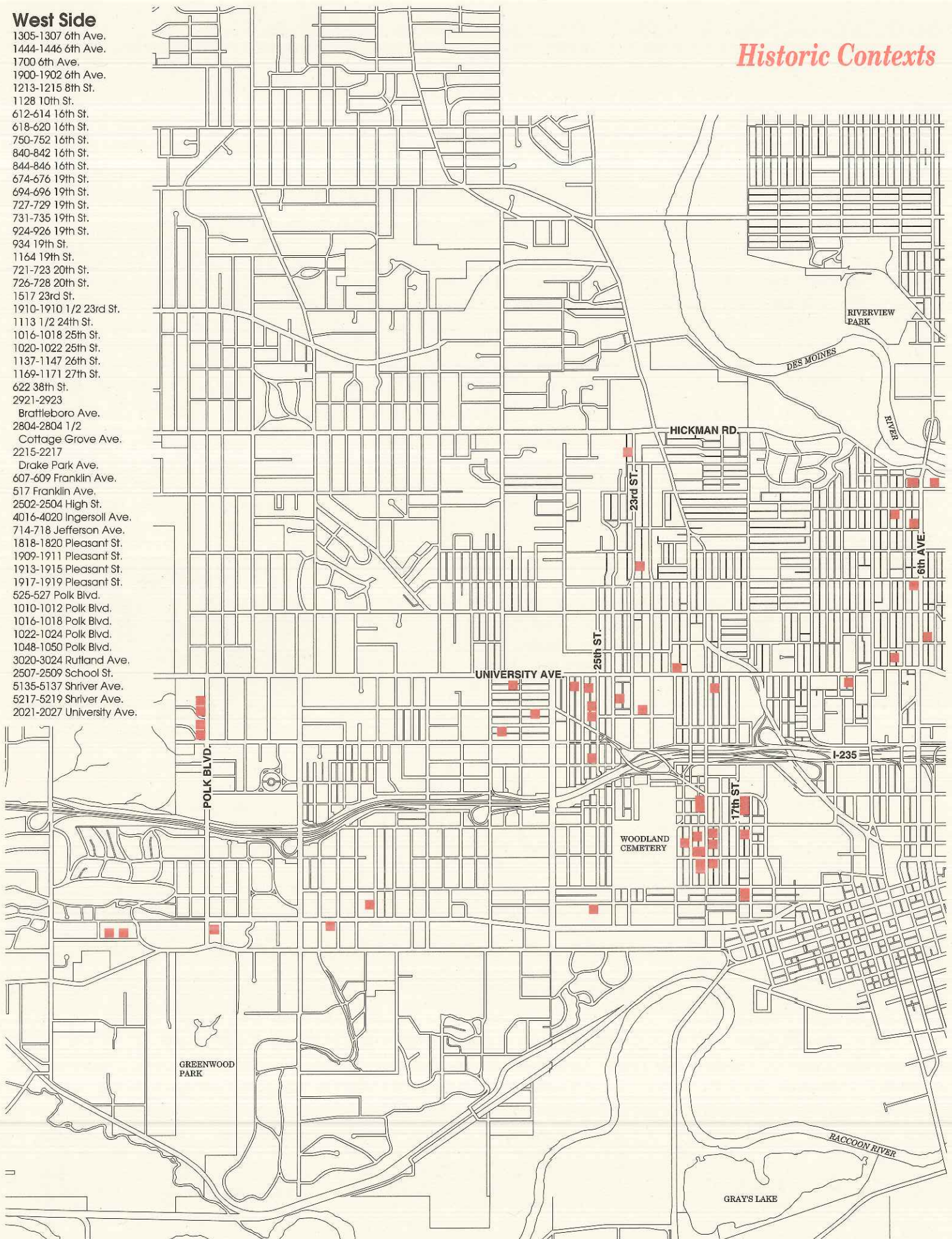
Today, only a few remnants of row houses are left. One of the best surviving is the Wetherell and Ericsson architect office at 1106 High Street.

In spite of the present-day scarcity of row houses, a study of this style will help to generate a greater public understanding of the urban character of early Des Moines. Most people did not live in a private home provided with a stable for a horse and buggy that would accord them the kind of personal freedom now associated with an automobile. Early residents relied on public transportation and walking to get about. They lived closer to their jobs in neighborhoods more densely settled than neighborhoods today.

West Side

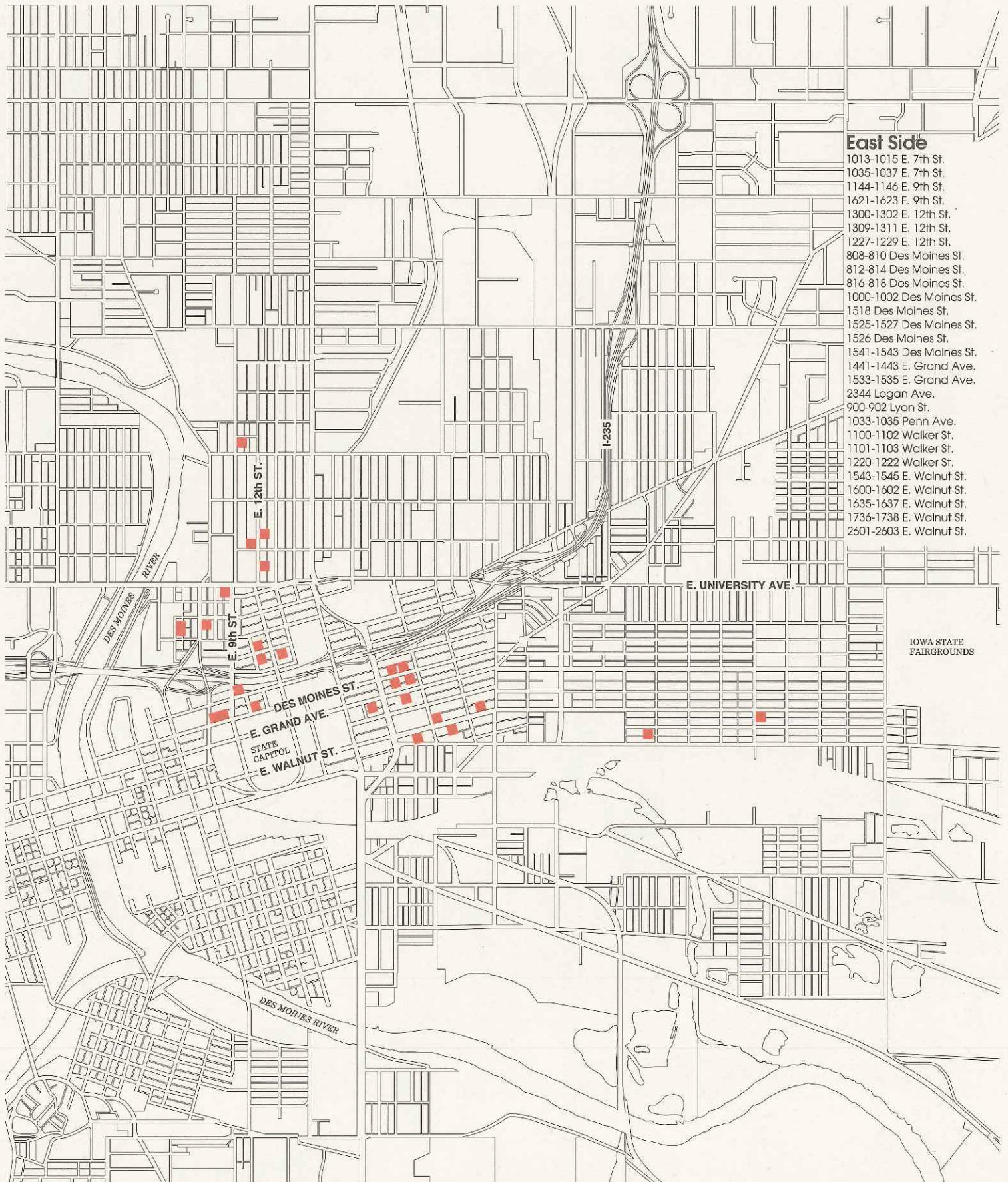
1305-1307 6th Ave.
1444-1446 6th Ave.
1700 6th Ave.
1900-1902 6th Ave.
1213-1215 8th St.
1128 10th St.
612-614 16th St.
618-620 16th St.
750-752 16th St.
840-842 16th St.
844-846 16th St.
674-676 19th St.
694-696 19th St.
727-729 19th St.
731-735 19th St.
924-926 19th St.
934 19th St.
1164 19th St.
721-723 20th St.
726-728 20th St.
1517 23rd St.
1910-1910 1/2 23rd St.
1113 1/2 24th St.
1016-1018 25th St.
1020-1022 25th St.
1137-1147 26th St.
1169-1171 27th St.
622 38th St.
2921-2923
Brattleboro Ave.
2804-2804 1/2
Cottage Grove Ave.
2215-2217
Drake Park Ave.
607-609 Franklin Ave.
517 Franklin Ave.
2502-2504 High St.
4016-4020 Ingersoll Ave.
714-718 Jefferson Ave.
1818-1820 Pleasant St.
1909-1911 Pleasant St.
1913-1915 Pleasant St.
1917-1919 Pleasant St.
525-527 Polk Blvd.
1010-1012 Polk Blvd.
1016-1018 Polk Blvd.
1022-1024 Polk Blvd.
1048-1050 Polk Blvd.
3020-3024 Rutland Ave.
2507-2509 School St.
5135-5137 Shriver Ave.
5217-5219 Shriver Ave.
2021-2027 University Ave.

Historic Contexts



Double Houses and Row Houses

DES MOINES CITY-WIDE MAP, 1990



East Side

- 1013-1015 E. 7th St.
- 1035-1037 E. 7th St.
- 1144-1146 E. 9th St.
- 1621-1623 E. 9th St.
- 1300-1302 E. 12th St.
- 1309-1311 E. 12th St.
- 1227-1229 E. 12th St.
- 808-810 Des Moines St.
- 812-814 Des Moines St.
- 816-818 Des Moines St.
- 1000-1002 Des Moines St.
- 1518 Des Moines St.
- 1525-1527 Des Moines St.
- 1526 Des Moines St.
- 1541-1543 Des Moines St.
- 1441-1443 E. Grand Ave.
- 1533-1535 E. Grand Ave.
- 2344 Logan Ave.
- 900-902 Lyon St.
- 1033-1035 Penn Ave.
- 1100-1102 Walker St.
- 1101-1103 Walker St.
- 1220-1222 Walker St.
- 1543-1545 E. Walnut St.
- 1600-1602 E. Walnut St.
- 1635-1637 E. Walnut St.
- 1736-1738 E. Walnut St.
- 2601-2603 E. Walnut St.

IOWA STATE
FAIRGROUNDS

**Recommendations for
Future Study**

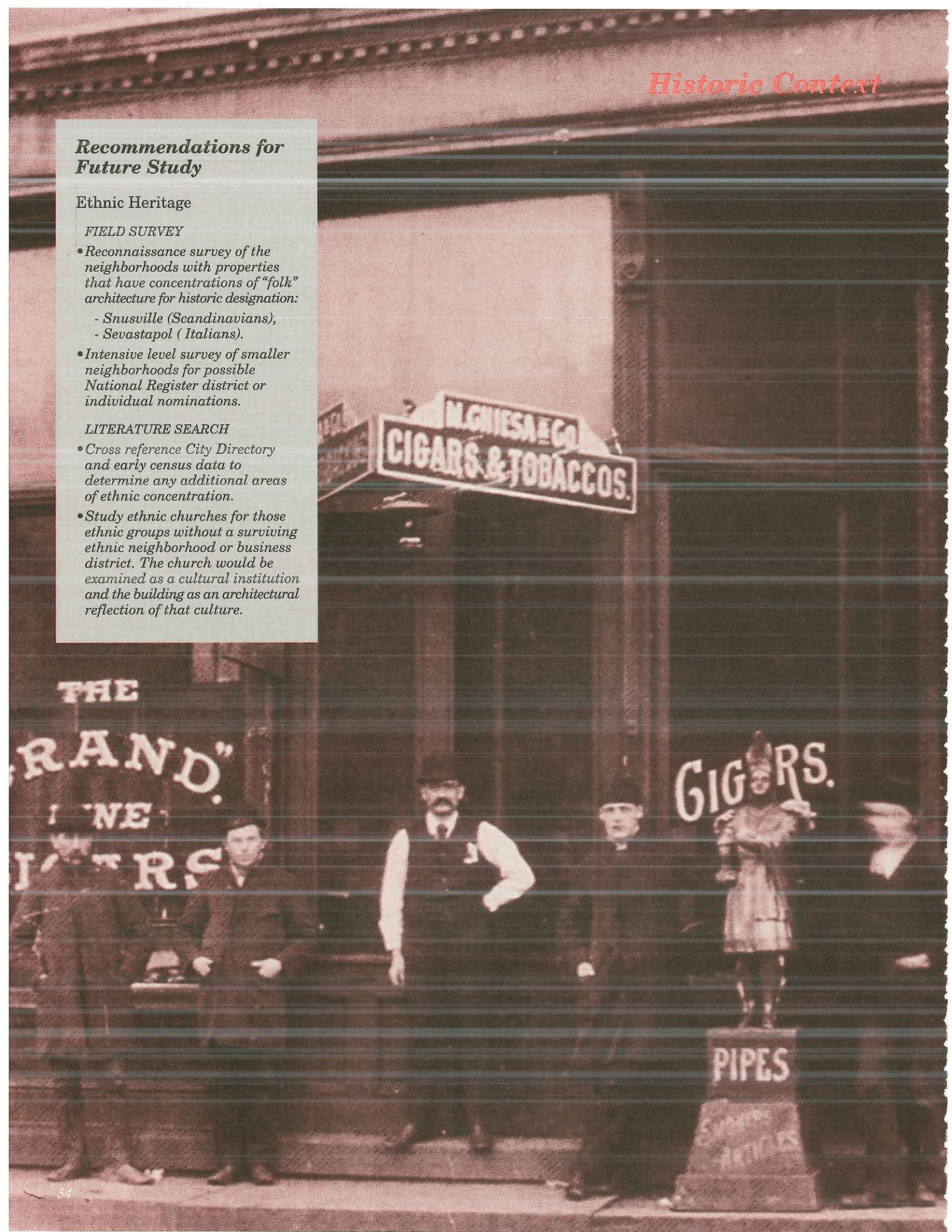
Ethnic Heritage

FIELD SURVEY

- *Reconnaissance survey of the neighborhoods with properties that have concentrations of "folk" architecture for historic designation:*
 - *Snusville (Scandinavians),*
 - *Sevastapol (Italians).*
- *Intensive level survey of smaller neighborhoods for possible National Register district or individual nominations.*

LITERATURE SEARCH

- *Cross reference City Directory and early census data to determine any additional areas of ethnic concentration.*
- *Study ethnic churches for those ethnic groups without a surviving ethnic neighborhood or business district. The church would be examined as a cultural institution and the building as an architectural reflection of that culture.*



3 Ethnic Heritage Before the Melting Pot

Des Moines has not had a predominant foreign ethnic flavor, as has existed in Cedar Rapids, with its Czech population, or in Davenport, with its German population. Ethnic groups in Des Moines are a patchwork: Scandinavians, Italians, Jews, Germans, Irish, Blacks, Lithuanians, Mexicans, Greeks and Latvians.

In earlier years many of these groups were clustered into small ethnic neighborhoods. The boundaries of these neighborhoods have remained indistinct to current researchers. To bring the boundaries into clearer focus, consultant John Zeller compiled lists of four ethnic groups using the street by street index of the 1908 City Directory. These four groups included: Blacks, Jews, Italians and Scandinavians. The resulting map shows strong concentrations of these ethnic groups in various parts of the City.

In the 1908 City Directory, Blacks are indicated by a (c) after the name standing for "colored." The addresses of the other three ethnic groups were picked out more subjectively by surname. The weakness in this approach is confusion between Jewish and German surnames on the West Side and Jewish and Lithuanian names near the State Capitol. Further study with the Federal 1900 census data and the 1895 state census will clarify this problem.

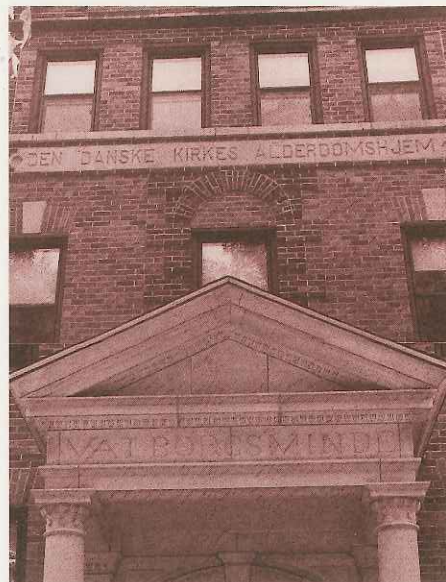
Since most new immigrant groups shared the condition of poverty, their neighborhoods often developed together in areas of poor housing. Blacks and Italians lived together in the old White Chapel district south of Elm Street and North of the Raccoon River. Jews and Blacks overlapped in the area of East Court and East First Street. Jews and Scandinavians lived together north of East Grand. German Jew and German Christians were heavily mixed on the north side. How these early associations affected race relations in later years would be interesting to pursue.

Marco Chiesa Tobacco Store, Italian American owned, at Fourth and Depot Streets, 1890

Over the years some of these groups have moved and dispersed over the city. Redevelopment has eliminated many of the structures that were home to early ethnic groups. The Scandinavians and Italians, however, have hung on to parts of their original neighborhoods where vestiges of their original ethnic flavor can still be found in churches, groceries, businesses and homes.

Scandinavians

Swedes, Norwegian and Danish neighborhoods have remained on the East Side. The various Scandinavian churches still stand in this



*Valborgsminde (Danish for "in memory of Valborg")
1914 Valborg Lutheran Home, E 12th and Grandview*

area. The two early settlements near the Des Moines River have all been replaced but much of the population has marched to the north along the East 9th Streetcar line.

The Hull Avenue Swedish settlement at the "end of the line" was called commonly "Snusville". Residents in that region have rediscovered that heritage with street banners and signage.

Again, searching the 1900 census to separate the various Scandinavian nationalities would help delineate any individual ethnic enclaves that might lead to recognition and listing

on the National Register.

Italians

There are two distinct Italian groups in Des Moines. One is the Calabrese from the "toe" of the Italian boot, who came to Des Moines to work on the railroad in the 1890s, primarily the Wabash Railroad.

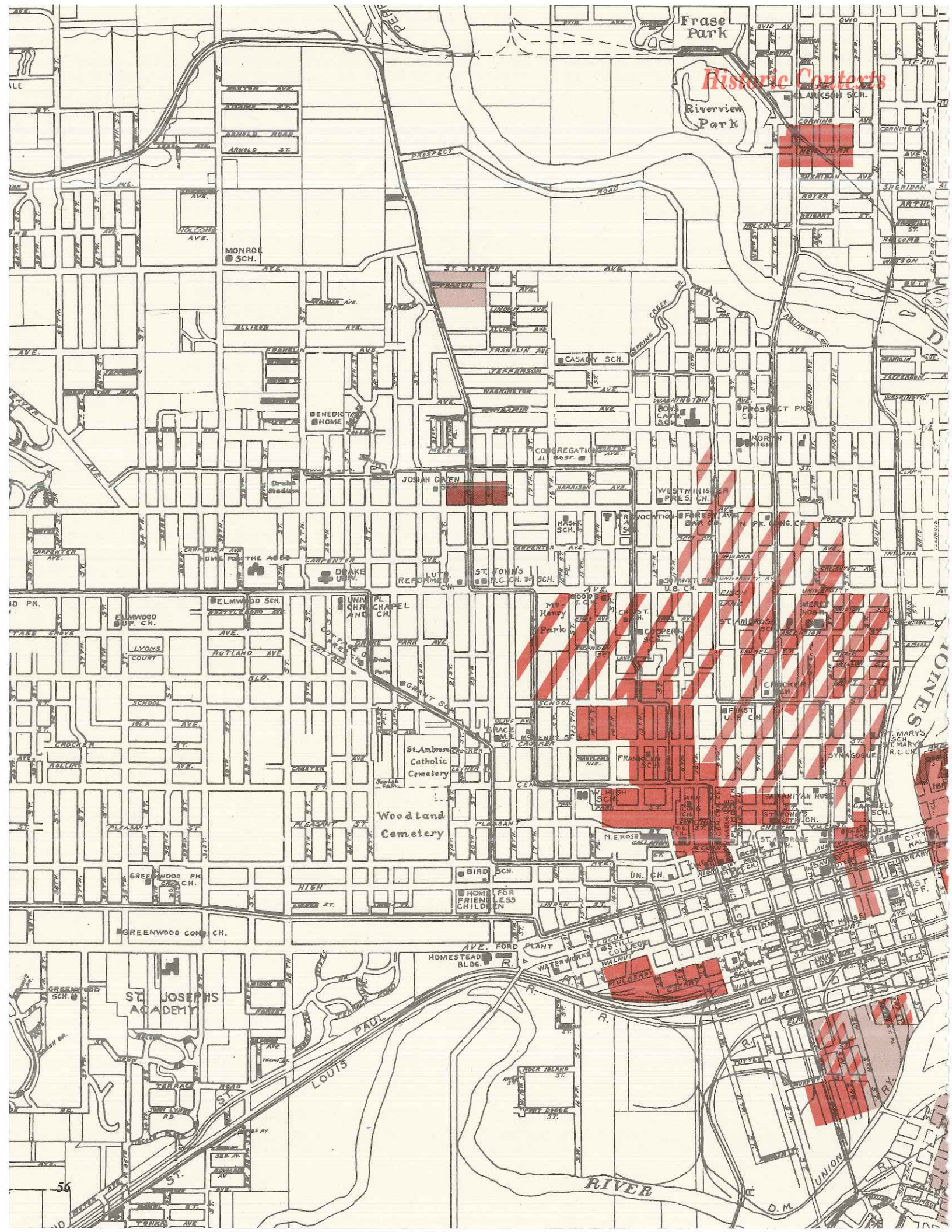
The Calabrese community has roots in individual villages, such as Scala and Terravecchia, from hence large numbers of immigrants left Southern Italy bound directly for Des Moines to join relatives already living here. They originally settled near their tracks in South Des Moines over the Raccoon River. However, a significant settlement was re-established at the instigation of the railroad to the White Chapel area to force out the red-light district. The Calabrese were successful in establishing the most cohesive ethnic community in their South Side Des Moines Little Italy. The neighborhood has many extant structures, including a commercial area, societies and the only Italian Catholic Church in the Des Moines area.

Other Italian regions are represented in the coal mining communities in north Des Moines and Polk County. Francis Avenue, near Martin Luther King Parkway, has a settlement of coal miners from Abruzzi, an Italian region on the Adriatic east of Naples; Many came from the towns of Campobasso and Termoli. Italians in Highland Park, and the towns of Enterprise and Madrid came largely from the northern provinces of Modena and Tuscany.

Jews

Jewish settlers in Des Moines were from many different countries. Jewish settlement patterns in the city were divided by Eastern and Western European countries but near other ethnic groups. Des Moines' Eastern European Jewish population intermingled with African-Americans near East First Street and Court Avenue and with Scandinavians on the near East Side

Historic Contexts



Frase Park

Riverview Park

MONROE SCH.

ST. JOSEPH

CASARY SCH.

BENEDICT HOME

JOSHUA GIVEN

ST. JOHN'S R.C. CH.

St. Henry Park

St. Ambrose Catholic Cemetery

Woodland Cemetery

ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY

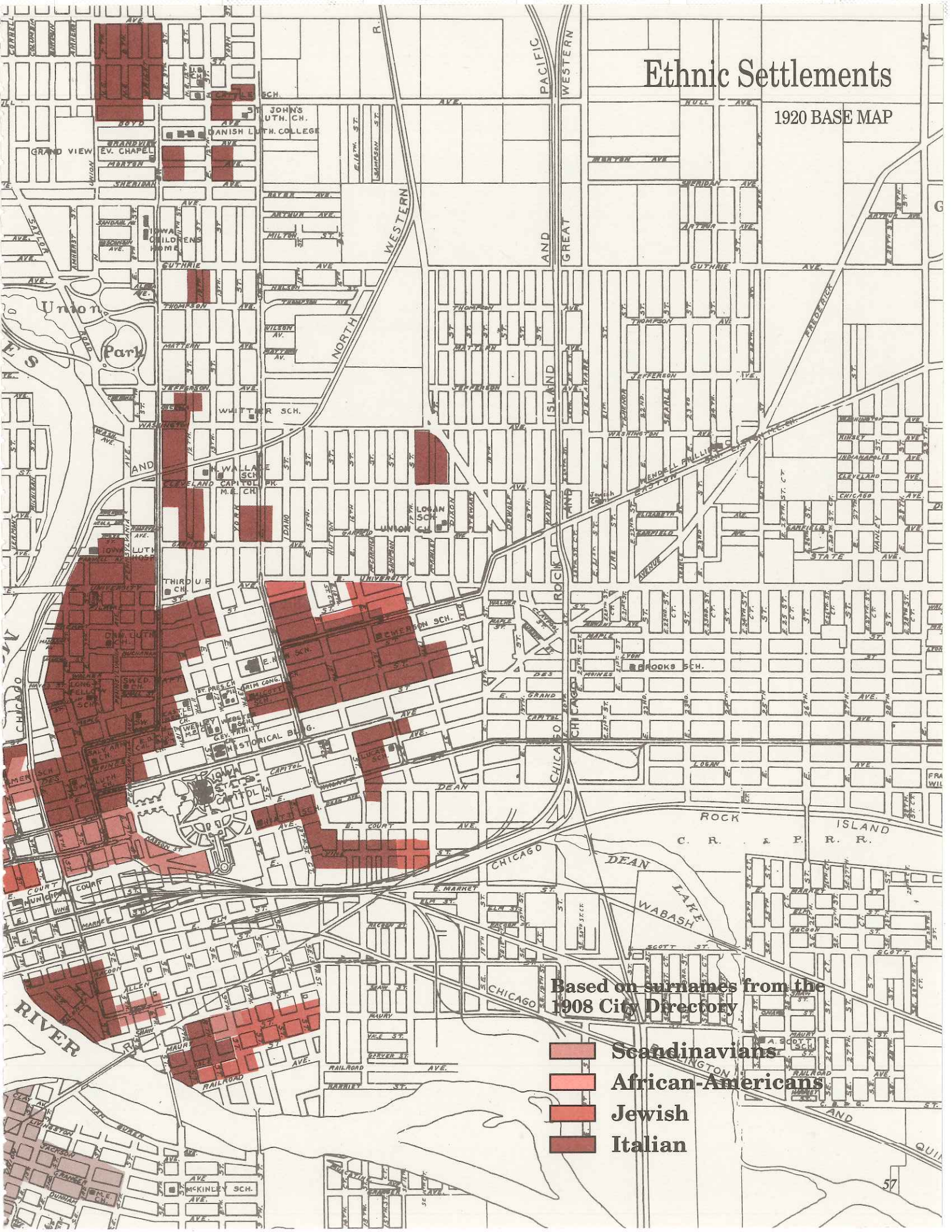
HOMESTEAD BLDG.

RIVER

UNION

Ethnic Settlements

1920 BASE MAP



Based on surnames from the 1908 City Directory

-  Scandinavians
-  African-Americans
-  Jewish
-  Italian

north of Grand. A Jewish synagogue was located near by at East 2nd and Des Moines Streets and at Lyon and East 6th Streets (Both non-extant). As large numbers of Eastern European Jews moved to Des Moines, a Jewish settlement house was opened at East 5th and Maple Streets (Non-extant). More well-to-do Eastern Jews moved to Walker Street on the East



Bokhara apartment building, 1910, was built on the West Ninth Street car line in a German/Jewish area.

Side. Much of the East Side Commercial Business District, consisting of businesses like groceries, peddlers, furniture and clothing stores, had Jewish owners.

German Jews had a presence in Des Moines as early as the 1840s and 1850s. By the 1880s they generally had more money and lived in nicer homes than their East side counterparts. They lived among the German-speaking Catholics and Lithuanians north of Grand Avenue on the west side of the river.

In the 1920s, the Beth El Jacob Synagogue (extant) and Jewish Community Center (Non-extant) were built in this area. German Jews are under-represented on the ethnic map due to problems with the research method. Further study with the 1900 census data would clarify

this problem.

Germans

The Germans constituted one of the largest ethnic groups to settle Des Moines and much of the Midwest. This group was also one of the ethnic groups to most quickly assimilate to American culture.

There are no extant German residential settlements in Des Moines. There was, however, a German business district on 4th Street between Walnut and Court, where the Hawkeye Insurance Building still stands. This recently rehabilitated building housed the *Democratic Iowa State Leader*, a newspaper, and the American Emigrant Society which aided immigration of Germans' to Iowa in the 1880s.

Irish

The Irish were one of the earliest groups to settle in Polk County. A colony of Irish hotels owners resided south of the Rock Island tracks along Third and Fourth streets. In the 1870s, railway trackage and new industry forced the Irish community to move north and assimilate in the general community.

Lithuanians

Lithuanians came to Des Moines to mine coal in the early twentieth century. They had their own church, St. Visitation, south of the Iowa State Capitol. Unfortunately, the church fell victim to Capitol expansion plans.

Although most persons from Lithuanian descent still live on the East Side, a significant loss of Lithuanian population in Des Moines occurred

in 1920 after a push from the U.S. Department of Justice to rid the country of reputed Communist sympathizers. The subsequent "Palmer Raids" caused many Lithuanians to relocate from Des Moines and other large American cities.

Latvians

Latvians came to Des Moines following the Second World War as exiles from Communism and domination by the Soviet Union. Their ethnic influence is strongest felt in East Des Moines where the Latvian Association in Iowa has established a hall at East 12th Street and Cleveland Avenue.

Most Latvians are Lutheran and worship at the East side Swedish churches of Unity Lutheran and the First Lutheran. Catholic Latvians who immigrated from Southeastern Latvia attend church at Visitation Catholic Church on East 9th Street.

As exiles Latvians have had a strong feeling for preserving the language and culture of their homeland. The Latvian community promotes preservation of their language with an active Latvian language choir.

Mexicans

Mexicans moved to Polk County in the 1920s when the Rock Island Railroad recruited Mexican families for labor in the Valley Junction railroad repair shops. Some Mexican laborers were brought in as strike breakers, others came because of the availability of railroad jobs and the willingness to work hard. As with other ethnic groups, the new arrivals were often resented by those who had arrived earlier.

Today about 80 percent of Hispanics in Des Moines are Mexicans. The remaining 20 percent are mostly newcomers from El Salvador and Nicaragua who have arrived after the 1986 Amnesty program. Both West Des Moines and Des Moines share areas of the Hispanic community. In West Des Moines at 8910 Walnut Street, are the offices of the League

Ethnic Heritage Before the Melting Pot

of United Latin American Citizens and the Midwest Education Resources Development Fund, Inc., which administers to the educational needs of the community.

According to the 1990 census, the largest numbers of Mexicans are located on the south and east sides of Des Moines. Near the packing plants in Des Moines on the East side, a large community of recent immigrants has grown up.

East side Mexicans have established a strong ethnic neighborhood near 9th and Scott Streets. Nearby is the Spanish language Catholic Mission, Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel. Close to the church is an Hispanic center run by Hispanic Educational Resources (HER) which on weekends leases the hall to the United Mexican American Community Center (UMACC) for dances. Also at East 14th Street and East Grand Avenue are Mexican restaurants, a Mexican grocery store and Spanish language video stores enriching the culture of Des Moines as well as supporting the Spanish speaking persons in the area.

African-Americans

Historical societies typically mark sites of notable events and disappeared landmarks, while preservation groups seek to protect surviving pieces of that past. African-American urban history, however, presents challenges to these established approaches yet suggests new creative opportunities.

The challenge lies in that much of the African-American neighborhoods, businesses, and homes have been erased by the growth of downtown Des Moines. The *Ethnic Settlement Map* shows these areas in 1908.

The African-American settlement at East First and Court Avenue was routed for the riverfront beautification program in the early 1920s. The large concentration of African-American families bordering both banks of Bird's Run Creek was removed in this period when Bird's Run was buried under the new avenue,

Keosauqua Way. The neighborhood south of Vine Street commonly called "White Chapel" and shared with Italians, gave way to a completely commercial district by 1930.

Many African-American families moved into older white neighborhoods north of Center Street near Methodist Hospital and to the older near-North side close by Mercy Hospital. These neighborhoods vanished for the MacVicar Freeway and the famed African-American business district on Center Street running from 15th Street down the hill to Keosauqua Way was demolished for urban renewal.

Sadly, the African-American community has been displaced so often by the wrecking ball of progress, efforts to find and preserve structures that mark their contributions to Des Moines can seem futile.

Aside from the problem of finding buildings to preserve, the preservation of African-American history and culture in Des Moines is very much alive. The African-American experience in Des Moines is being collected and shared by historian Frances Hawthorne, Elaine Estes at the Public Library, and many others. There is also a new Buxton Museum. These histories find an appreciative audience with the listeners to radio station KUCB and readers to the newspaper, *The Communicator*. Past historical issues of the *Iowa Bystander* were preserved and old photos shared within the community.

The African-American community has strong roots here in Des Moines. One reason for its cohesiveness was in defense against racial discrimination. One 1918 report described how racial barriers, restrictive housing covenants, all white restaurants and hotels, and limited social interaction between races were all more common in Des Moines than in Cedar Rapids. This ethnic community has been the largest and most stable in population of its kind in Iowa. Other towns in southern Iowa employed large numbers of African-American coal miners,

but when the mines closed around 1920, many of these workers found permanent homes and employment here in Des Moines.

Permanent cultural institutions like African-American Baptist and Methodist churches (the Burns A.M.P. Church surviving nearly 130 years) have helped to preserve a legacy of kinship and self reliance within the African-American community. African-American families continue to pass down a broader genealogy, encompassing family, friends, and community. These are interesting stories and within the African-American community, even young people have a keen sense of historical perspective.

This community has also been home to some interesting people: P.N. Hyde, a successful businessman who ran the H & H Cleaning Company, successful lawyers Gertrude Rush and S. Joe Brown, Sue M. Brown, a Civil Rights worker who refused to be discriminated against in 1910, and bridge engineer Archie Alexander. While in 1993 Harding Road was renamed by the city in honor of Martin Luther King, none of these local African-Americans has as yet been so honored.

Likewise, there are a few extant structures relating to African-Americans. Wilkie House, the Burns A.M.E. Church, and Fort Des Moines #3 (home of the Negro Officer Training School during World War One) all need to be highlighted and preserved.

The Des Moines African-American community is vitally interested in preserving its history. As a city, Des Moines has the resources to facilitate this. There are sites to commemorate, buildings to preserve, oral histories to record, and African-American art, music, theater, dance, and literature to save and protect. Much of this is alive today in the Des Moines' African-American community. There is no need to breathe life into dusty records, the opportunity now avails us to broaden our vision of preservation and enrich the greater community.



Historic Context

Recommendations for Future Study

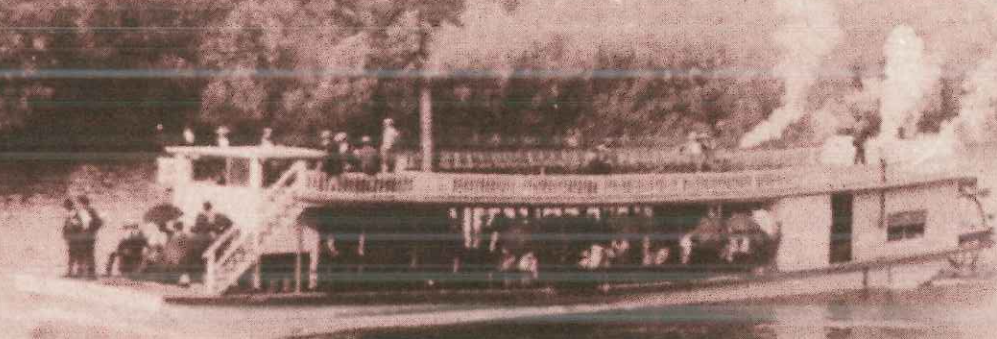
Life with the Rivers

FIELD SURVEY

- *Archeological survey of remaining historic and prehistoric sites.*

LITERATURE SEARCH

- *History of Des Moines development using the Rivers as both a dividing and unifying force.*
- *A variety of Sub contexts should be explored:*
 - *River boat traffic,*
 - *Boat landings,*
 - *River front industries such as dams, ice houses and mills,*
 - *Recreational Structures.*
 - Boat houses,*
 - Bath houses.*



The City of Des Moines has two major rivers coursing toward the center of town. These rivers—the Des Moines and Raccoon—anchor the community at the point of their confluence, and have served as geographical boundaries for the growth of distinct neighborhoods.

Des Moines is unique to be divided by rivers large enough to seriously impede commerce between parts of town. Most cities in the Midwest that are located on large rivers have developed on just one side, as is the case with Omaha, St. Louis and Sioux City. Smaller towns might develop on the opposite bank, but the level of traffic between them would be small enough to limit the number of expensive bridges.

This awkward and expensive arrangement originated in the town's

creation. Fort Des Moines was located on the western bank while the Indian Agency was founded on the East Side. East Side land owners realized that they would need a major reason to keep the town from growing solely on the West Side. They succeeded by giving the state the land necessary to move the state capitol to East Des Moines in 1857 and then funding its construction. This act alone assured that the city would forever span the rivers.

Uniting The City

Bridging these rivers has been a major headache for the city. Most of the early wooden bridges were demolished by either ice jams, floods or heavy traffic. In 1869 both the Walnut Street and Court Avenue bridges went down and the city


scrambled to sell \$140,000 of bonds to reunite the town. To pay the interest on the bonds the city decreed that tolls be collected on the new iron bridges, beginning a twelve-year period when citizens forded the rivers to avoid the toll. To discourage this traffic, the City ran barbed wire along the riverbank—down the steep banks onto sandbars in low water and across the ice in the winter. (To save ten cents, a sorry few saw their wagon boxes float off and their unhitched teams swimming off to freedom.) This taxation of commerce within a city's boundaries is unprecedented elsewhere in Iowa. It also served to protect the fledgling East Side business district from West Side competition.

The expenditure for bridges within the city has been an area of intense sectional strife and vested interest.



BRIDGE

MILLER'S
Double Tubular Wrought Iron Bridge
"The Best Iron Bridge in Existence."



JONES & SHIB,
DES MOINES,
General Agents for the State of Iowa.

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Adapted to Railroads and Turnpikes,
And is Built as Cheaply as Wooden Bridges in Spans
of Thirty to Four Hundred Feet, with
or without Sidewalks.

We are prepared to erect them upon the shortest notice, and on the most favorable terms.

LOCAL AGENTS WANTED.
CIRCULARS AND OTHER INFORMATION FURNISHED UPON APPLICATION.
A careful investigation is respectfully solicited.

We Build Superstructures Only.

No. 6, 189-10.

Riverboat passengers circa 1898 (left)

Advertisement for an iron bridge (inset)

Walnut Street bridge over the Des Moines River, 1891 (opposite, top)

The steamer Leaman, sunk in 1902 (opposite, bottom)

The existing Jackson Street bridge over the Raccoon was stalled two years from 1896 to 1898, by lawsuits initiated by East Siders who sought a bridge tying their business district to the south side.

At its height, thirteen iron wagon bridges and ten railway bridges spanned the two rivers. Major iron bridge companies were located in the city (the King Bridge Company predominated). The economic impact of bridges was so important that businesses located on Locust Street and Grand Avenue raised the funds themselves to build their own river links in 1885 and 1886. Pictorial brochures showing views of the city in this period display the city bridges as an emblem of civic industry.

The construction of the present day Melan Arch concrete Des Moines River bridges (1906 -1917) and their relationship to the "Des Moines Plan" of city government and the City Beautiful Movement is well documented by the multiple properties document *The City Beautiful Movement and City Planning in Des Moines, Iowa 1881-1918*.

The older, narrow iron bridges were then looked upon as an embarrassment to the city; a physical reminder of the corrupt days of city



Miss Allie Wingate, 1899



W.P.A. construction of the west river wall along the Des Moines River, 1939

government in the old City Hall at Second and Locust streets. Even lately there is sentiment favorable to the removal of the Jackson Street Bridge—the last survivor of these iron wagon bridges erected from 1869-1905.

Preserving the 1898 Jackson Street Bridge would save for the next generation a piece of the iron bridge era of Des Moines history. A review has been made of the Jackson Street bridge's unique pin construction. A broader survey is underway of all iron bridges built in Des Moines, documenting their dates of construction, type, builder, cost, history and demolition.

Flooding

The great flooding of 1993 was a rude surprise to a city that thought that with the Saylorville Dam, such disasters were a thing of the past. The only flood in history to rival it was the the 1851 flood; 78 inches of rain fell that summer. Des Moines was then, only a village of five hundred. Hardy pioneers weathered that

epic summer in sturdy log cabins built for Fort Des Moines.

Other big floods occurred in 1892, 1902 and 1903. By these years, the City had bridges, dykes and valuable downtown property that they raced to save from the surging waters. In 1902, people were left homeless; businesses flooded in the industrial district; the water plant was threatened by the high waters; volunteers reinforced levees and funds were raised to aid sufferers.

In response to the flooding of 1902 and 1903, the Raccoon River was rechanneled in 1914 to reduce south side flooding. Dikes were built to protect the new neighborhoods of Central Place and the Swedish South Bottoms (now known as the Southeast Bottoms).

In spite of these disasters or because of the improvements, the City proceeded with Riverfront Beautification. Des Moines did not wall itself off from the river. Arguments over the balance of beauty vs. protection on the river banks continue into our future.